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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE FIFTH CONFERENCE

Report of the Africa East Division

Submitted by the United Nations Group of Experts
on Geographical Names**

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1. The Africa East Division comprises Botswana, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, the United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius and Seychelles.

2. The Division was represented at the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names, held at Montreal, Canada, in August 1987.

3. Though the Division has not held meetings since the Fifth Conference, activities in the standardization of geographical names have continued at various levels. Reports from the member countries reveal the status in those countries since the Montreal Conference and are summarized below.

Activities in the Division

Botswana

4. The Place-Names Commission has been actively engaged in nearly half of the villages in Botswana. It meets once a year in six or seven selected villages: the meetings are publicized. Since 1988 it has met over 50 times. It has examined maps at scales 1:50,000, 1:250,000 and 1:500,000 and a number of new reports, charts and maps prior to their publication.

5. The Commission checks the language, the local pronunciation, the recognized meaning and the historical background. As there are about 80 languages or dialects in Botswana, a recognized orthography has been published to help in the correct pronunciation of a name.

6. The Commissioners have worked tirelessly for the last three years and have produced the "Fourth Report of the Place-Names Commission", which is currently being studied by the Cabinet.

7. The Commission recognizes that it has a mammoth task ahead of it in the standardization of geographical names in Botswana.

Ethiopia

8. After the Fifth Conference, the Ethiopia Mapping Agency (EMA) established the Geographical Names Study and Gazetteer Panel at a divisional level, to be responsible for the collection, transliteration and dissemination of geographical names. The activities of the panel and its contacts with concerned government organizations concerning geographical names will be aimed at creating a National Names Authority. Until then it has set out to produce a preliminary concise gazetteer of Ethiopia and to revise the Amharic-to-English transliteration system already in use.

9. Ever since the Fifth Conference Ethiopia has aimed at producing a national gazetteer. A concise gazetteer of Ethiopia based on a 1:1,000,000 map has been prepared as a preliminary attempt, containing about 2,500

geographical names. This preliminary edition is distributed among government institutions for comments and suggestions with a view to publishing the first concise National Gazetteer.

10. The main focus is on producing a gazetteer series by administrative or autonomous region, based on the 1:50,000 scale topographic map of Ethiopia. These will finally be combined to form the National Gazetteer of Ethiopia using standardized geographical names.

Kenya

11. Activities related to standardization of geographical names have continued. It is estimated that over 5,000 place-names have been processed by the Standing Committee on Geographical Names since the Fifth Conference. A revised copy of the gazetteer and a card index for new and amended names continue to be maintained for the purpose of publishing the third edition of the gazetteer.

12. It should be noted that the Survey of Kenya is currently installing computers at its Ruaraka offices in Nairobi to improve its mapping operations. The use of computers in the creation of databases for geographical names and the automation of the national gazetteer production will certainly be given priority by the Survey of Kenya.

Malawi

13. Malawi has not as yet set up any national committee on the standardization of geographical names; hence the exercise on standardizing names has not been started. The Commissioner of Surveys is however hopeful that he will sensitize his Government to view favourably the formation of a national committee on the standardization of geographical names.

Mozambique

14. Dinageca, the National Directorate for Geography and Cadastre is the government body that coordinates all activities concerned with toponymy. In this context, Dinageca has been involved in toponymic activities as follows:

(a) Description and updating of cartographic names and settlements according to the first toponymic file published during the Portuguese administration early in 1973, taking into account the new villages and towns established after independence in 1975;

(b) Revision of the toponymic dictionary published during the Portuguese administration period, taking into account the new villages and towns established, or those which changed their names after independence, as well as the new territorial division dating from 1986;

(c) In 1990, an investigation in which one technician took part about changes in population centres in each province and district, which resulted in the publication of a book entitled Evolution of Toponymy and Territorial Division between 1974 and 1987;

(d) Exchange of toponymic information between Dinageca and the Commission of Toponymy of the National Geographic Institute (IGN) of France and the United States Board on Geographic Names.

Swaziland

15. Swaziland has a Place-Names Committee, which has not met for years. It is still hoped that it will be revived.

United Republic of Tanzania

16. The United Republic of Tanzania established a National Geographical Names Standardization Committee in 1982. No report has been received on its activities since the Fifth Conference.

Uganda

17. Since the Third Conference in Athens in 1977 no report has been received from Uganda.

Zambia

18. A Standing Committee to advise the Government on matters related to geographical names was appointed in 1978. However, since the Fifth Conference no report has been received regarding its activities.

Zimbabwe

19. Zimbabwe has a Geographical Names Standing Committee (GNSC) of which the Surveyor-General is the Chairman. The situation of the standardization of geographical names in Zimbabwe will be adequately covered by the Chairman of GNSC when submitting his country's national report to the Sixth Conference.

Mauritius

20. There is no established list of geographical names of the island. However, a compilation of a preliminary list of the main geographical names of the island and its territories extracted from the toponymy of the new 1:25,000 map series is expected to be prepared. It will consist of official names that are approved by the Government. These names usually originate from official records, including maps, and some of them have a strong historical background.

21. It is apparent that there is no established committee charged with the responsibility of processing geographical names in Mauritius.

Other member countries of the Division

22. No information has been received from other member countries of the Division, namely Lesotho, Madagascar and Seychelles, but it is expected that activities in the field of standardization of geographical names is still continuing.

Training

23. There is an urgent need to hold a training course or a seminar in the Africa East Division to start nurturing a nucleus of experts in the field of standardization of geographical names. In this regard Kenya is still interested in hosting a toponymic training course for the Division in pursuance of resolution V/21 of the Fifth Conference on education and training.

Conclusions and recommendations

24. Standardization of geographical names is at varying levels within the Division: some member countries have well-established functional committees while others have none. At the heart of it is lack of recognition by policy makers, with the result that no funds are allocated for its sustenance in a society with many competing needs.

25. It is also important to point out that not many people in Government in the developing countries appreciate the importance of standardization of geographical names. It is thus incumbent upon the United Nations to publicize the importance of standardization. One way would be to hold regular training courses or seminars in the Division; another by regularly sending out newsletters, circulars and documents to the member countries for information and appraisal on issues on this subject.

26. It is hoped by Kenya that member States of the Africa East Division will exert more effort to work together to see that the existing organs dealing with standardization of geographical names are strengthened or revitalized in order to achieve the desired goals.